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THE TRUTH ABOUT HAYTI.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY J. N. LÉGER, ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND
MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY FROM HAYTI TO THE
UNITED STATES.

Now and then, sensational stories about Hayti appear in the newspapers. Sometimes, people who are ignorant even of the correct geographical position of the island think they can talk with competency about the Haytians and their country; and, indeed, statements from such a source are unworthy of attention. But, unfortunately, it seems that the strange inventions concerning voodoo, "*papa-loi*," etc., are beginning to be taken in earnest by the best men in the United States. I have just read in the May number of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW what Mr. Colquhoun, writing on the future of the negro, says about Hayti. I am not at liberty to discuss the negro problem. That problem is for the American people a question of political and social interest; and it would not be proper for me to interfere in such a controversy, nor have I any desire to do so.

However, I cannot help noticing that many a time Hayti is made a scape-goat by men and newspapers who have a purpose of their own to serve: hence all the persistent and grotesque misrepresentations about a country which is struggling hard for progress and liberty. Mr. Colquhoun, whose good faith is certainly beyond question, must have been misled by these misrepresentations when he wrote that "Hayti has become a byword among the nations, and it is incontrovertible that, with the removal of white control, the negroes have reverted to a condition almost of savagery." In different words, this is the story about Hayti which is told over and over by sensational newspapers, viz.: "Hayti is less civilized than it was a hundred years ago; it is lapsing into barbarism."

All lovers of truth would prefer substantial facts to such asseverations. Nations, like individuals, have their honor, their dignity to maintain; they must have the right to ask their accusers for proofs, when an attempt is made upon their good name.

To be a byword among the nations, Hayti must be, indeed, the worst country in the world. Whereas, any impartial observer, any one who will take the trouble of thoroughly studying the people, their customs and their government, will reach but one conclusion: Hayti is no worse than the other Central and South-American Republics, and it is very far from relapsing into barbarism.

To revert to a condition almost of savagery, to relapse into barbarism, a nation must be, at the time when the charge is made, in a state of civilization less advanced than formerly, it must be going backward instead of forward. So, to ascertain whether, since the removal of the white control, the Haytian negroes have or have not "reverted to a condition almost of savagery," one must necessarily compare their condition to-day with their condition before the "removal of the white control." What was the condition of the Haytian negroes a hundred years ago? They were slaves. They were treated like beasts. They were compelled to work like machines in the fields. They could not read. They could not write. They were not even good artisans, because they were not allowed to learn anything. The sanctity of their homes was held at naught and profaned; their daughters, their wives were mere pastime for their white masters. Their degradation was complete.

Such was the condition of the Haytian negroes under the white control; a condition which will be found minutely described in the many books written on Santo-Domingo at the end of the eighteenth century or in the early days of the nineteenth century.

It is needless to say that the condition of the Haytian negroes is quite different now. When the Haytians proclaimed their independence, all the Frenchmen were expelled from the country. The factories, the rich plantations, had been all destroyed during the war. The Haytians found themselves in possession of a devastated land. Besides, they agreed, in the first years of their independence, while the country was still in ashes, to pay a heavy indemnity to France. Hayti, being the first country to abolish slavery, met at the very beginning of its existence with the ill-

will of all the powerful nations which were then slave-owners. These nations did their best to strangle in its cradle the young people whose entrance into political life was the most energetic refutation of absurd prejudices; the new State was, in their opinion, a bad example for their subjects in Jamaica, Cuba, Guadeloupe.

So Hayti could not rely on any outside help in building up its government and educating its citizens, the majority of whom were men who had just emerged from slavery. The Haytians had then to create all instrumentalities of government and administration, from statesmen to policemen. Their detractors do not seem to have ever thought of the difficulties they had to overcome. On the contrary, they affect to believe that my fellow-countrymen, to show their ability to govern themselves, ought to behave like saints and to be perfect models of virtue; forgetting intentionally that some nations of the Old World are still struggling to reach the best form of government and are from time to time subject to appalling scandals. However, from the outset, the responsibility of the Haytians was great; their recognition of this responsibility helped them to work out their destiny. Their cities and towns have been rebuilt. They cultivate, nowadays, their own properties, for almost every inhabitant of the island is a landowner. Now every man is a man. The sons of the former slaves are to-day lawyers, doctors, physicians, architects, engineers, sculptors, chemists, skilled artisans, shrewd business men, good laborers; some of them, without being multi-millionaires, live on large incomes. The Haytians operate their own telegraph system; they control their own telephone system. They build their railroads without external help. Under the white control, there was not even a decent primary school in the island; to-day, Hayti devotes almost a sixth of its revenues to education. All the schools are free, from the elementary ones to the highest. There are Law Schools, a Medicine and Pharmacy School, a School for Electrical Sciences, even a Painting School; and these are open to all. Not satisfied with the knowledge acquired at home, many Haytians go to France to obtain still higher or special instruction; they achieve success in the French Schools of Mines, of Agriculture, of Moral and Political Sciences, etc.

Religion and education combine their efforts for the moral advancement of the mass of the people. Since 1860, there has been

a Concordat with the Holy See. The Pope has a diplomatic representative in Hayti, a Legate; and Hayti sends a Minister to the Vatican, to say nothing of its other Legations abroad. There is at least one Catholic priest in every commune of the republic. Almost all the priests are European; and, after living in the closest intimacy with people of all classes on the island, they return to Europe in their old age. Is it not strange that not one of them has ever mentioned voodoo or cannibalism as existing in Hayti? The same remark can be made concerning the clergymen of the Protestant faith. They must know the country better than the traveller who spends but a few days in Port-au-Prince in quest of sensational news for a book or a credulous newspaper. Yet none of them has until now given an account of personal observation of voodoo or cannibalism there. And, as Mr. Bassett, a former United States Minister to Hayti, properly said in an article on the subject: "How is it that the story is in general left to be told by fleeting visitors, who never, or at any rate very rarely, go among the country people, and who know little or nothing of their language?" The truth is that voodoo and cannibalism do not exist any more in Hayti than the "night doctor" in Washington.

Personal safety is everywhere assured; one can travel from one end of the island to the other without trouble or danger. In the remotest mountains, a foreigner will find peaceful, kind-hearted and hospitable men. There is no race prejudice or hatred. Frenchmen and Germans marry Haytian girls, and many Haytians have white wives; all of them have very happy homes.

In the light of these facts and conditions, which may be easily verified, Haytians may confidently appeal to the fair-minded and intelligent reader to decide whether the assertions so frequently made, that they are relapsing into barbarism and reverting to a condition almost of savagery, are worthy of credence, or are merely unjust and unsupported aspersions upon a people who, since their emancipation from white control, have been striving, with success commensurate with their opportunities, to attain the practical ideals of modern civilization.

J. N. LÈGER.